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SUBJECT: TURKISH "AMBASSADOR" HOLDS A HARD LINE ON THE
CYPRUS ISSUE

REF: USUN 992

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald L. Schlicher; Reason 1.4 (b)
and (d)

11. (C) Summary: In a May 16 conversation with Ambassador Schlicher, Aydan Karahan, the Turkish "Ambassador" to the "TRNC," stressed that Ankara was still waiting for a reply to both the Gul proposal from January on the mutual easing of restrictions and the April 4 letter from Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat to UN SYG Annan. The Turkish side would continue to insist that the UN respond. In the meantime, Ankara supported the work of the technical committees but objected to any effort by the Greek Cypriot side to include political issues on the agenda. Famagusta-Varosha, in particular, was clearly a final status issue. While Karahan stressed that he had nothing against UN SRSG Moeller "personally," he complained about Moeller's perceived pro-Greek Cypriot bias and poor coordination between UNFICYP and UN headquarters. The Ambassador emphasized our support for Moeller's and the importance of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots regaining the initiative in the public relations game. Karahan complained about Cyprus becoming an issue for Turkey's EU accession process. This was never something Ankara had accepted. Cyprus was still "a national issue" for Turkey. For now, Turkey was focused on the UNFICYP report and was looking to the United States to ensure that it was fair and objective. Karahan made it absolutely clear to us that whenever Turkish and Turkish Cypriot interests diverged -- as they seem to be doing over the issue of Famagusta-Varosha -- Ankara's interests would determine the policy. End Summary.

12. (C) Karahan stressed that Turkish FM Gul had put a serious proposal for the mutual easing of restrictions on the table in January and Ankara was still waiting for a response from the UN. Moreover, Turkish Cypriot leader Talat's April 4 letter to the Secretary General asking Annan whether he continued to support his name-sake plan remained unanswered. This was why the Turkish/Turkish Cypriot side had reacted so strongly to Greek Cypriot attempts to include political issues on the agenda for the technical committees. Ankara supported the work of the committees, but would not allow them to serve as the leading edge of a Greek Cypriot effort to substitute a piecemeal approach for a comprehensive effort at negotiating a settlement. The technical committees should focus only on technical issues. If they proved successful, it might open the door to a more comprehensive approach. An issue like Varosha, however, was clearly an element of a final settlement package that could not be handled separately from the negotiations on an overall solution. Negotiating a separate deal on Varosha "would not be in Turkey's national

interest." Allowing the Greek Cypriots to include political issues on the agenda for the technical talks would be tantamount to offering "concessions in exchange for nothing."

Karahan emphasized, however, that the Turkish/Turkish Cypriot side was ready -- in fact eager -- to begin talks on comprehensive settlement immediately.

¶3. (C) Although Karahan said that he had nothing against SRSG Moeller personally, he proceeded to offer a long list of the UNFICYP COM's ostensible shortcomings, focusing in particular on his perceived pro-Greek Cypriot bias. Moeller had also failed to coordinate adequately with New York. UNFICYP and UN Headquarters often seemed to be giving out different signals with respect to the handling of the Cyprus issue. Karahan noted Ankara's interest in seeing a new SRSG appointed to oversee the political track (Note: a sentiment he evidently shares with Cypriot President Papadopoulos). Turkey had been assured, Karahan asserted, that the UN would appoint a more senior figure to manage the negotiations once serious talks resumed. In the meantime, Ankara was focused on the upcoming UNFICYP report. Karahan hoped that the report, which he assumed Moeller would draft, would be fair and objective. (Note: It was quite clear that he doubted this would be the case.) Ankara, he added, was looking to the United States to ensure that the report reflected Turkey's positive stance. The Ambassador emphasized our support for Moeller's efforts to get the parties to agreement on the technical committees, and dismissed Karahan's charges of bias as wildly off-base, and urged Karahan to meet personally with Moeller to seek to clear the air. Karahan rather contemptuously dismissed the idea.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador warned Karahan that Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots were losing the public relations game, and allowing Papadopoulos to paint Talat as the intransigent

party. This did not reflect the fundamental political realities, and was not in Ankara's interest. Karahan expressed little concern over this. The Turkish side was not blocking progress, he insisted. Rather, Ankara supported the parties taking up "humanitarian" issues such as the environment and agriculture as quickly as possible.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador asked Karahan for his views on Turkey's EU accession process. The Turkish "ambassador" complained about Cyprus becoming an issue for Turkey in negotiations with the EU. "This was never something we accepted," he said. Cyprus, he reminded the Ambassador, was still "a national issue for Turkey." The Gul proposal from January could have benefited all involved in the accession process, but had so far generated little response. Meanwhile, Papadopoulos had given an interview to a French publication ("L'Express") in which he rejected the concept of federation. The Turkish side had done all that it could and the Turkish Cypriots had voted in favor of a solution in ¶2004. Turkey would continue to insist on a reply to both the Gul proposal and the Talat letter of April 4. (Note Karahan gave no indication he was aware of the substance of U/SYG Gambari's recent briefing to the P-5, in which he indicated that a response to the Gul proposal at least was in the works (reftel)).

¶6. (C) The Ambassador asked Karahan whether there had been any movement on the issue of civilian control of the police in the north, which Talat has been seeking. Karahan was cautious in his reply. The security situation on the island was governed by nothing more than a truce arrangement. Under those circumstances, it would be a mistake to divide the command of the security forces.

¶7. (C) On the issue of municipal elections in the north, Karahan predicted that both Oktay Kayalp in Famagusta and Sumer Aygin in Kyrenia would hold onto their seats. The Nicosia race was closer and would likely come down to a two-way competition between the incumbent CTP candidate Kutlay Erk and the DP's Cemal Bulutogullari. Karahan made no secret of his preference for the DP candidate.

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18. (C) Comment: Karahan's message was unusually hard-line and his tone somewhat nasty, as indeed it often is with is Turkish Cypriot interlocutors. He made clear to us that Turkey's national interests -- which he seemed to define in a very narrow fashion -- would trump Turkish Cypriot interests whenever the two came into conflict. The Turkish Cypriots, meanwhile, are all too aware of this, and Talat's recent spate of angry letters to the SYG should be understood at least in part as an effort to shore up his credentials as a hard-nosed defender of both Turkish and Turkish Cypriot interests. Karahan represents one wall of the political box Talat finds himself in as he attempts to revive a serious effort at negotiating a Cyprus settlement. Karahan's assurance in emphatically dismissing the possibility of a deal on Famagusta-Varosha was consistent with what we have been hearing from our Turkish Cypriot contacts about the Turkish position. We have seen no sign from the Turkish officials on the island of any hint of flexibility on this issue. It is one of several areas -- EU aid is another -- in which Turkish and Turkish Cypriot interests are increasingly divergent. This bodes poorly for both the Cyprus issue and for a smooth review of Turkey's EU-accession process later this year.
SCHLICHER